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SOME UNPUBLISHED DETAILS

OF

The Two First Years in Canada

OF

THE MOST REV. ASHTON OXENDEN, D.D.

Lord Bishop of Montreal and Metropolitan of Canada

by Justice Ramsay

BIBLIOTHEQUE
MONTREAL
1871
SANT-SULPICE

"Try to forget, my Reverend Brethren, any little specialities, either of doctrine or practice, which have in days past ranged you on separate sides; and think only of the greatness of those matters on which you are sent here to deliberate, and of His honour which should be dearer to you than all else. Look at each question which shall come before you, not as to how it will affect yourselves, but how it will affect the Church at large."

These words of wisdom are taken from the inaugural address of Bishop Oxenden at the first meeting of the Diocesan Synod after his arrival in Canada. Men who heard them began almost to hope that some real advantage might have been gained by the compromise which made the Rector of Pluckley, Bishop of Montreal and Metropolitan of Canada. Two years experience since has allowed us to compare the Bishop's practice with the lesson he thus preached.

Shortly after his arrival an attempt was made by a portion of the Cathedral Congregation to get rid of the Senior Canon of the Cathedral and one of its Assistant Ministers. Some of the more respectable members of this party tried to excuse their conduct on the pretext that the Cathedral funds could not support the expense of the two clergymen then employed; but every one knew that this was not the real reason, and that party spirit was at the bottom of the whole intrigue. A difficulty however stood in the way of this cabal. By the terms of his engagement the Revd. Canon Loosmore could not be got rid of, if he could not be induced to resign, without the concurrence of the Bishop. This concurrence, the Dean endeavoured to obtain. Instead of adopting the straight forward and manly course of at once refusing it, as he knew he ought, the Bishop did his utmost to induce Mr. Loosmore to condemn himself and to resign. It is impossible to believe that in giving this advice the Bishop considered Mr. Loosmore's interest; but he was perfectly ready to sacrifice Mr. Loosmore's character in order to avoid the necessity of either stultifying himself, or of coming into conflict with the wrong-doers who were attempting to persecute Mr. Loosmore. Forced at last to speak he timidly decided in favour of Mr. Loosmore.

Later one of the oldest clergymen of the Diocese gave offence to a few influential members of his Congregation, in what respect does not appear, and the Bishop at once attempted to deprive him of his living, and only desisted from fear of consequences. The clergyman refused to admit the doctrine that he held his living *ad nutum*.

A third case was that of Mr. Prime. His licence was withdrawn on the complaint that he had circulated a document called the "Rule of Life." It turned out that he had made use of two copies to the extent of recommending some of the prayers it contained to be used in private devotional exercises. It could not for a moment be maintained, by any one having a pretence to reason, that the use of a formulary of prayers, which had been condemned by no ecclesiastical authority, could be a valid ground of suspension, and to do the Bishop's intelligence full justice he did not so nakedly pretend. He bolstered up his decision by the considerations that Mr. Prime's licence was (1) *granted under peculiar circumstances* and (2) *that, only two months ago*; and perhaps by a third consideration, not avowed to Mr. Prime, that St. John the Evangelist's, where he officiated as curate, was "a suspected and isolated Church apart from the rest of the Diocese." It would be unwise, however, to allow oneself to be confused by the Bishop's bad logic. Mr. Prime was suspended either because he recommended the prayers in the "Rule of Life" to two people, or because the Bishop did not like him and *suspected* St. John the Evangelist's. In either case the decision is without precedent, and as contrary to the practice of the Church, as it is to every principle of justice.

Even in the Church of Rome, the arbitrariness of whose rule is so often insisted on, no one incurs a penalty for a writing which is not condemned. In the Privy Council, after a regular trial for heresy, the party accused is always allowed to recant before final sentence is pronounced. Only a few months ago Mr. Voysey was allowed a week to recant. Mr. Prime offered at once to desist from circulating the "Rule of Life" if the Bishop should desire it, and after that tender of submission he was suspended.

To these three cases a fourth may be added. A most exemplary and over-worked country clergyman, in delicate health, was obliged to resign the two charges he held, asking for work of a less fatiguing kind. His resignation was accepted; but all other employment was refused to him in the Diocese, and the Revd. Mr. Eirly was compelled

to take refuge elsewhere. This was certainly not owing to the superabundance of clergymen in the Diocese of Montreal.

Each of these cases is sufficient, taken by itself, to startle the least prejudiced observer; but they have a curious feature in common. All these clergymen, who have been thus harassed, belong to the party in the Church, who, unlike Sydney Smith's clerical acquaintance, literally believe the whole 39 articles, and neither coil up a radiator under the altar table, nor make fun of the sign of the Cross.

The object of these pages is to draw the attention of the Provincial Synod to this attempt to make the Bishop an autocrat; not only sole dispenser of all the patronage of the Church; but the absolute and final judge as to matter of doctrine, and the arbitrary ruler over every clergyman in the Diocese. It will doubtless be attempted to blind the eyes of the public by turning Mr. Prime into ridicule; but the vagaries of Mr. Prime are mere accidents. They have nothing to do with the question so practically put by the Bishop in spite of his protestations of moderation. There was nothing eccentric about either Mr. Loosemore, Mr. Davidson or Mr. Early, and yet they got pretty much the same amount of protection and consideration from their Bishop as the Reverend Mr. Prime. All have been sacrificed to the persecution of a party.

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